Queensland's Leading Amiga User Group Newsletter

CURSOR

COMMODORE-AMIGA
COMPUTER
USERS
GROUP
QLD Inc.

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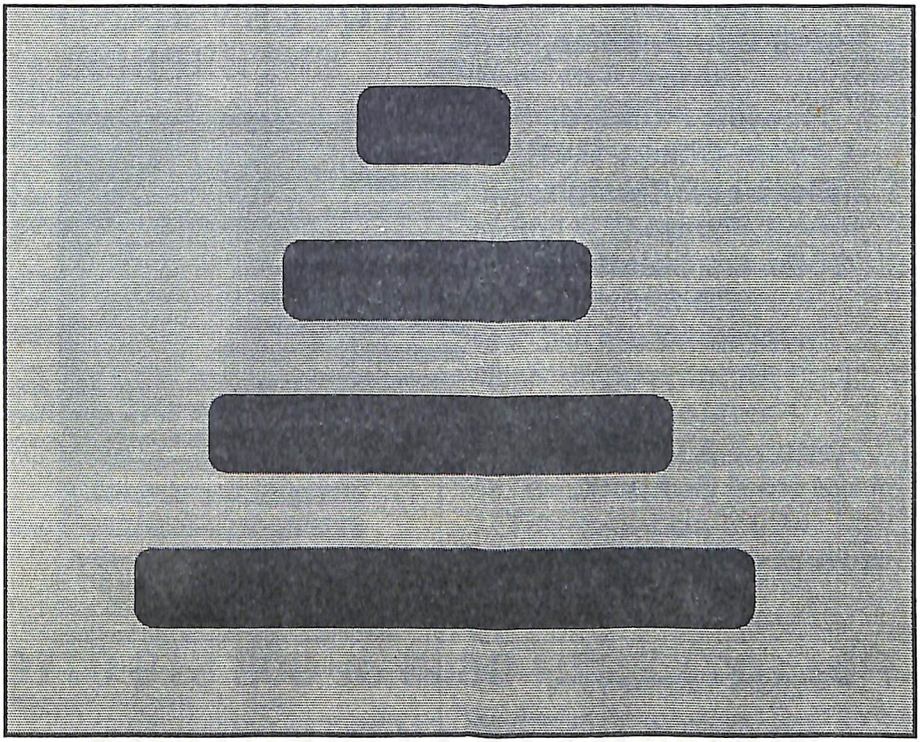
AMIGA



NEW

LOGO

TECHNOLOGIES

Next Main Meeting - Tuesday 1st August
St. Laurence's College - South Brisbane
Libraries & Sales open from 7pm
Meeting & Demonstration commence at 8pm
Visitors and All Members Welcome

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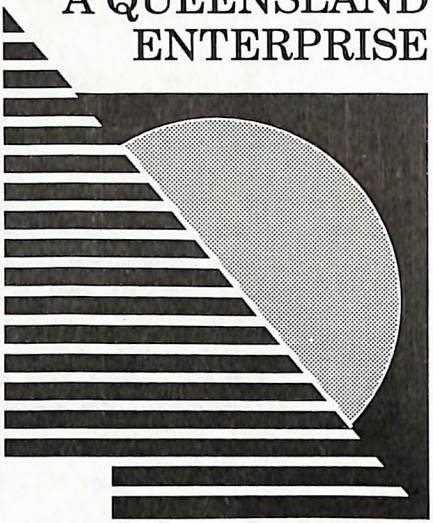

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SECRETARY: **Barry Benyon**
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TREASURER: **Bob Baxter**
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Ph. (07) 3801-1020

C-64/128 CONTACT: **Doreen Horne**
Ph. (07) 3398-7441

B. B. S.s

We have two BBSs available for C.C.U.G.Q. members:-

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(075) 463 252 ... local call from GoldCoast
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Voice: Ph. (075) 463-317
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WindDragon Inn BBS ... 3 lines
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SYSOP: **Keith Antoine**
Voice: Ph. 3300-2161
FidoNet Node No. 3: 640/562
AmigaNet Node No 41:400/556
These two BBSs are available at speeds of 300 - 28,800 baud.

Mailing Address:

The Secretary
C.C.U.G.Q. Inc.
P.O. Box 274
SPRINGWOOD QLD 4127

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MAIN MEETING

The next meeting will be held on
Tuesday **August 1st** (7pm - 10pm)
St. Laurence's College
82 Stephens Road
South Brisbane Qld.

WORKSHOP MEETING

The next workshop meeting will be held on
Sunday **August 13th** (11am - 4pm)
Ithaca R.S.L. Hall
Cnr Nash & Elizabeth Streets
Rosalie Qld.

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Presidents report for 95

I have been in the position of Club President for 8 to 9 months and found it to be quite a varied experience. I have found it very difficult to be in attendance the first Tuesday of every month, due to my eyesight driving at night. I have indicated to one and all my difficulties, and as a consequence my reluctance to carry on in that position. I will however undertake to continue to arrange the meeting speaker/demonstrators. That is not to say that I will never come along to the Tuesday meetings. Along with others that I have proposed to the committee is that in future I will download newly released files suitable for our PD library and place them online for the librarian and give the editor a listing of them to publish each month.

The year itself started out on uneven ground in that the future of C= was uncertain and Phil Guerney found it necessary to resign. However in April we were relieved to hear that Escom had successfully bid for C= and were the new owners. Later we were to find out that they will be producing Amiga machines for Christmas 95, these will only be the new 4000T and an upgraded 1200 and possibly CD32 consoles. Things look a great deal brighter for the coming 12 months, with the possibility of the appearance of a RISC based machine, a very welcome sight.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee for putting up with me and for all their efforts over the past 12 months. I can say quite categorically that they have been the mainstays of the club, not I. I would also thank those who rose to the occasion and gave demonstrations, talks etc on their areas of expertise, and filled in an otherwise empty nights meeting. All the above has made my job that much easier, not that I did all that much.

In closing, I wish the club, its members and the new Committee good fortune for the next 12 months.

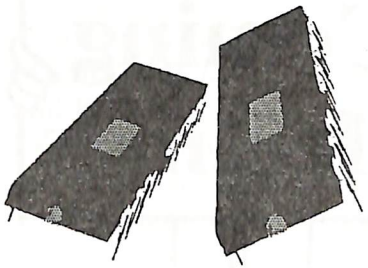
Keith Antoine

"El Pres"

●♂☺♀●

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN IT'S TIME TO SEE

The
AMIGA
Specialist
Tony May



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Please always refer to the latest CURSOR for information on the next meeting as the following plans are always subject to change.

August 1st 1995

Annual General Meeting and election of our Club Management Committee.

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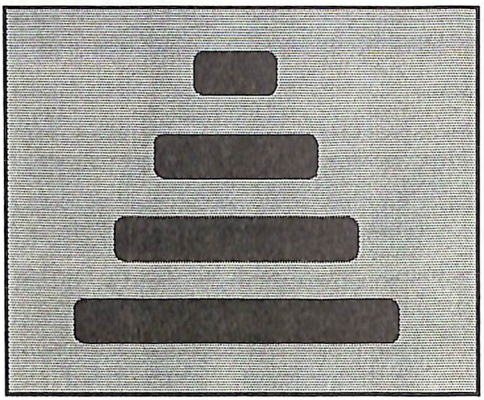
The Cover Story

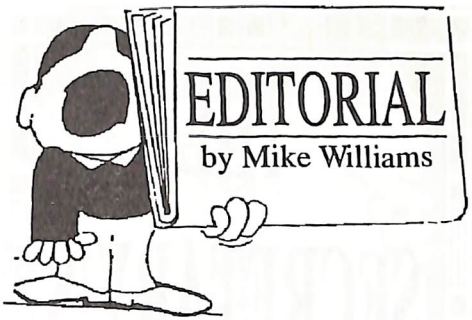


The cover picture this month was created by yours truly (Mike Williams, your Cursor Editor) within Pagestream 2.2.

Originally, I was trying to reproduce an IFF file of the new logo, which I downloaded from our BBS, however the picture quality wasn't up to scratch, and I decided not to waste time trying to improve it, but recreate the logo myself.

The logo actually appears on a side view of the new Amiga 4000T and fills the whole side of the casing. This gave me the original dimensions and spacing of the four bars and how they looked.

However, I then had to import it into Pagestream 3.0 so that I could retain all the ratio of curves when I reduced it down to a quarter size for the top of this column.



Well, here we are again and this is the start of C.C.U.G.Q.'s 12th year.

What were YOU doing 12 years ago? I know I was writing programs in BASIC on my Atari 400. Those were the days when computers had 4 kilobytes of memory, worked with cassette drives and cost the equivalent of $4000 in todays money, just for the main processing unit.

It wasn't until two years later, in 1987, that I bought my first Commodore computer, my trusty Amiga 1000. I know that I thought long and hard before I purchased the Amiga, as I originally wanted to buy the new Atari 16-bit computer which boasted similar features to the Amiga with the advantage of a built-in midi interface. However finally it was price that won out when I saw advertised a second-hand Amiga 1000 selling for $500 less than the new price. Can you believe that there were second-hand Amigas within a month of the launch of the Amiga in Australia. This Amiga was a NTSC version imported from USA with a Commodore 1080 monitor, and they both worked on 110 volts power (the guy had built his own transformer to convert our 240 volts down to the needed 110 volts).

This Amiga 1000 came with a total of 128k of memory, Workbench 1.1 and Kickstart 1.1 on a disk. I still have that Amiga, and my 19 year old daughter still uses it (with the 1080 monitor) after 10 years.

It's sad, after all that time, to see the Commodore name disappear from the Amiga, but we all know that things must change and evolve and I now look forward to a new future with "Amiga Technologies".

Just as the Amiga must change and evolve to survive, our Club must also change and evolve. It now no longer seems appropriate to have "Commodore" in the club's name and so we should be looking for a new club name to carry on the Amiga tradition of innovation into the 21st century. One obvious change would be to just delete "Commodore" which leaves it as the "Amiga Computer Users Group Qld. Inc." or the A.C.U.G.Q.

Please give this some thought, and contact any of the Committee with your ideas on a new club name.

Another issue that we will need to address is the forthcoming Annual General Meeting and the vacant

positions which will need to be filled for the Committee positions.

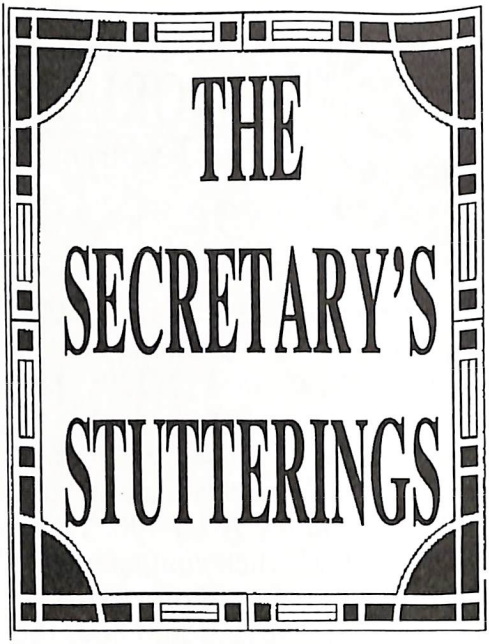
Our club is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the furthering of interest and support for the Amiga computer and assisting Club Members with their involvement in the Amiga.

As you may have read in the "President's Patch", Keith is finding that coming to the Tuesday night meeting is becoming more and more difficult because of his night-vision problem. This means that he will not be standing for President this year and a new President is being actively sought.

I would like each Club Member to think carefully about involving themselves by volunteering for one of the Committee positions. If you have been a long-time member, then now might be a good time to give back something to the Club which has been supporting you for so long. If you are a new member, then we also need your fresh ideas and your possibly different viewpoint. The work involved is small but the satisfaction gained can be very great. Remember ... if we don't have a Committee, then we don't have a Club.

Mike

Mike Williams - Editor ●♂☺♀●



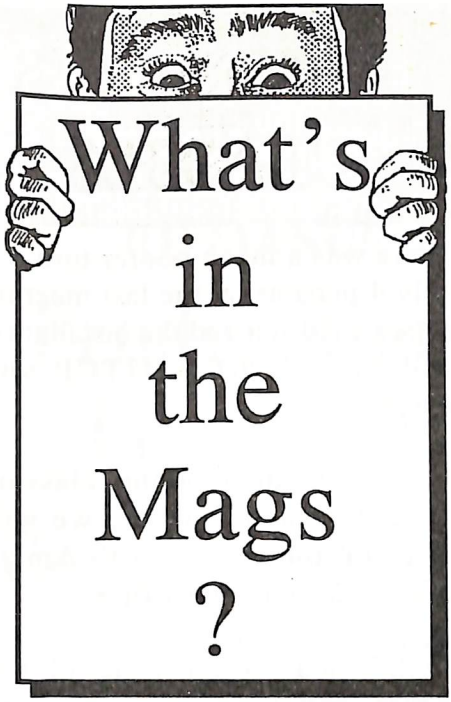
Members,
Just a quick reminder

As promised last month , please check the label on your Cursor for your membership expiry date.
e.g. "7/96"(these are the nice people)
or " 8/95"(possibly not so nice people).

September / October's Label will include your receipt number.

See you at the A.G.M.

Barry Benyon (Hon. Secretary)
14 Ash Ave.
Woodridge
Qld. 4114.
tel / fax (07) 3290-1521
●♂☺♀●



This column aims to give the reader a quick overview of some of the more interesting articles or reviews seen in the latest Amiga magazines. All of these magazines (and more) are available for borrowing from our Commercial Librarian at our Main Meeting held on the first Tuesday of the month.

Here is a sample of the articles appearing in these magazines.

The Australian Commodore & Amiga Review (A.C.A.R.)
July 1995

1. A review and comparison of 3 different A1200 budget-priced Accelerator boards, both with and without SCSI options.
2. A test-drive of the new Iomega Zip Drive, which is a hard-drive with removable disks, similar to the SyQuest or Bernoulli but at a very affordable price, both for the drive and the cartridges.
3. Amax IV, the latest version of the Apple Macintosh emulator is given a thorough workout.
4. TurboCalc v2.0 is a spreadsheet package for the Amiga and is given a good test, with the result that it "out-features all competing Amiga packages."

AMIGA USER INTERNAT'N'L - May 1995

1. Test drives of three new genlocks with ratings on each for features, performance, looks, feel, picture and quality.
2. A review of Stereo CAD which is a 3D-image generating software program designed to create those frustrating pictures of jumbled colours which turn into 3D images when stared at.
3. FX2000 Analog Joystick is tested which is sure to improve your flight-simulator or games performance.
4. My-Money is a new financial package similar but better than Home Office from Digita at a very reasonable price.
5. A test drive of the Epson EPL-5600 laser printer which prints in a true 600 DPI resolution.
6. GT-Prolog is a new Amiga

programming language.
7. A preview of the upgraded music program Octamed Pro V6.
8. A special report "10 years of the Amiga" which gives a good overview of Commodore from the early days to the present.

AMIGA COMPUTING - May 1995

1. This magazine comes with both a floppy disk and a Cd-Rom disk and they both actually have some good stuff on them, including "Smarty Paints" a commercial painting program which is able to be set up for different age-groups.
2. Easy Ledgers (by our ex-president Greg Perry) is reviewed and comes up with a creditable 9 out of 10 overall performance.
3. Squirrel SCSI device, which plugs into the PCMIA port and allows up to 7 SCSI devices to be connected, is reviewed.
4. Deluxe Paint 5 is put up against the newcomer Photogenics and shows that it is "horses for courses".
5. "Inside the Internet" is a feature article which is unashamedly biased for the Amiga and runs to 5 pages.
6. CanDo, the authoring software package is put through its paces, but this time the review is by a non-programmer, and shows just how much us "dummies" can get out of the software package.

●♂☺♀●

BEGINNERS CLASSES

There was a much poorer turn up, only 4 persons, at the last meeting where we discussed the installation and pitfalls of AMITCP and InterNet access.

I will be holding another class on the 20th August, where we will carry on once more with Amiga DOS commands and scripts.

I will look at the attendance of this, if there is not going to be any roll up I might consider terminating these classes.

I had been approached by users complaining about the lack of such tuition, now that's its a fact they are conspicuous by their absence.

Keith Antoine

●♂☺♀●

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PRINTING with an INKJET

by Rudi Florentinus

A few months ago I intended to speak at a main meeting about "Painting with Deluxe Paint IV". However at the last moment I changed my plan and decided to talk about "printing of an image from your disk".

Creating something in any media requires certain skills, it does not matter if it will turn out to be a masterpiece or not. Sadly enough we cannot decide this yet, we have not got it in our hands.

The public or better still, the judges will do that for you! And to do that they have to have it in front of them or it has to be hanging on the wall properly framed and presented.!! They will never come to your studio to have a look at your image on the monitor, so you have to print it.

If we, the "computer-artist", consider the computer and the software as our tools to create an image on disk (lets call this Stage One), then we have to overcome an other hurdle or Stage Two - Printing And Assembling.

Stage One is it, for most artists in any other media, be it water-colour, oil, acrylic, crayon, gouache or whatever. For us, the computer artist, we have to tackle the second stage. I found out this PRINTING to be to be the most difficult part of all and that will be our subject.

When we talk about printing we have to restrict our field to a certain level and let us make that restriction a monetary one and let us put that amount at $1000.00 (around about). So we will not talk about Colour Laser Printers or photographic enlarged printing, die-sublimation printing etc. etc.

In our field there are only two type of printers: dotmatrix printers and inkjet printers. The first mentioned have improved quality considerably but even with a resolution of 300 x 300 dpi the finished printout is still nowhere near the one we get from an inkjet printer. So we will stick to the inkjet-printer.

As you may know, the price of these printers have recently come

down considerably and are at present well in reach of the average "computer art" enthusiast and (just) in the limit of our self imposed "ceiling".

Well, now we have the choice of about 5 well-known printers. I have owned successively three of them and have a fair bit of experience with them. I do not wish to name them here in this article, but will focus on the pluses and minuses in general and the important characteristics in particular. But if you want to know more about a specific brand or model, unfortunately you have to see or talk to me personally. I am a lazy and very bad writer so I will not correspond about this subject!

I will write about the following most important factors we have to consider before we select our printer. Here they are and not necessarily in order of importance.
A: Performance
B: Print Quality
C: Ink and Paper
D: Operating cost
E: Loading

A: PERFORMANCE
Most inkjet printers are satisfactory provided they have a resolution of 300x 300 dpi minimum, in colour. Speed can be a factor for some applications but for colour printouts speed is not important. Firstly, the difference is minimal, and secondly high speed (most of the time) with a required density of ink is even undesir able (to prevent smudging caused by wet ink passing under the guides). Thirdly, in the final printout, quality is the only thing that counts and that is never achieved with printing at high speed. Abetter solution is just to print a smaller image if you want to see quickly how your work would look like. But this is only possible if the printer driver will do that (size your image) or you have to make a small image of the original.

Claims of 720 dpi by some manufacturers means sometimes 720 in one direction only and then only on special and very expensive paper! Watch out for that. My advice is have a print done from a object or image from your own disk in front of you! Before you buy! Even if you have to transfer it in IBM format.

B: PRINT QUALITY
This is very much interwoven with type and quality of ink. For some unknown reason, quality of ink was and is not an important factor for most manufacturers as this is hardly ever mentioned in the brochures. For instance, premature fading or discolouring ("graying")

Continued on page 16

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Printing with an Inkjet from page 13

of ink on paper is of paramount importance. The reason for this might well be the fact that, in general, prints are mostly used in a commercial sense for illustration or advertising and consequently after one glance will end up in the wastepaper basket or will stay in a folder, safely hidden from direct exposure from any light source.

I have never seen a manufacturer give any specifications or particulars let alone guarantees of their inks (with regard to resistance to Infra-Red and more importantly to Ultra-Violet rays) and fading characteristics.

C: INK

One of the main materials in the printing process. Every manufacturer advise to use only their ink as it is specially formulated for their machine and that any other ink is detrimental to the print-head or causes damage to the print-head.

Through personal experiences I do not trust any ink at face value! I saw my printouts made on a certain well known, worldwide sold printer, using their ink in their cartridges on their coated (very expensive) paper fading to barely visible images within two weeks! Those images were exposed to normal, bright daylight but not exposed to direct or reflected sunlight. It took me nearly one year to get a full refund of the machine, after numerous letters and challenges to the company to prove otherwise, . But they still would not admit that the ink was only suitable for a very limited exposure to light.

After this I will only consider a printer where I can replace the ink myself , or where the company will give a guarantee or give fading characteristics of their ink. This second option is very difficult if not impossible to obtain. (Even a Standard Safety Sheet is generally refused) so there is no other alternative than to use your own ink, the ink you know!

Replacing or re-inking can be done quite easily with most printers. Several firms can supply you with a full range of colours for different machines, claiming saving from 40% to 70%.

I personally prefer to buy an ink with known characteristics and where variations from the different basic colours (Magenta, Cyan, Yellow) can be formulated and to which you can add the required additives. By doing this you can save 90% of the cost of a standard cartridge and a refill of a cartridge, after some experience, can be done quite easily. For the above

mentioned reason, I will not consider a printer which uses a non water soluble ink nor a printer where 3 or 4 colours are combined in one cartridge, not only from an economical point but the quantity of ink is rather small in these and I found it nerve wrecking to print a poster consisting of 12 A4 sheets with a 100% ink coverage, for you can expect that after the first six are printed, one of the colours runs out and you have to start all over again!

The claim that every print-head when it needs replacing is destroyed by the use of "own" or refill-ink is definitely untrue. I had to replace a print-head just recently, and the new one (and they are not cheap) failed after two test prints and it is impossible that in that time-span ink can do so much damage to be the cause of the breakdown.

Besides one colour only was malfunctioning while the other three were working normally! I got without argument a replacement. This shows clearly that print-heads have a limited life and in this case unquestionably the fault was not the ink.! As with many parts (and you do not necessarily need to have a suspicious mind) you can expect a built in obsolescence.

PAPER: Generally I found that only coated paper gives satisfactory results . But here again it is entirely an individual matter. Even test-prints are in my opinion not very satisfactory on bond paper, as colours are not true and penetration of ink is also different requiring a different density. Coated paper as mentioned before is expensive but ultimately a must. The acid content of paper and of the board on which the printout has to be glued in case the picture consists of two or more pages has to be considered.

D: PRINTING COST
Cost of printing is practically dependent on the cost of ink, paper and replacement parts. Do not underestimate the cost of parts and labor. The minimum labor charge is $45.00 (this is pretty well a standard charge) and the hourly rate varies from $65.00 to $100.00.

I was quoted for a print-head from $240.00 to $329.50 (fitted for $429.00). This last figure included a labour cost to find out that the print head was faulty (that was what I told them in the first place) and replacing the head with a new one. This last operation, fully described in the User Manual, can be done by anybody in 30 seconds flat!

Cost of ink is much more than the brochures would like you to believe. I have never seen anywhere a costing for a fully covered sheet.

If you get 100 sheets (with 5% coverage) out of one cartridge with a certain density, you would get 5 prints (with 100% coverage) out of the same cartridge at the same density. Average cost of an original cartridge in colour is say $25.00. Ink cost would therefore be $5.00 for a single A4 sheet. This is naturally theoretical. But it gets even worse. If all the three or four colours are combined in one cartridge, there is no other alternative than to replace the whole cartridge as soon as one colour runs out!

My own experience is that over 4-5 years I have used more than 1.8 litre of ink. A cartridge from a certain printer holds not more than 7 ml, the average refill is closer to 5.5 ml. If we set an average price of $20.00 for a single cartridge (colour and black), I would have spent $6545.00 on ink alone. I fortunately found a cheaper way and a better way out.

E: LOADING OF PAPER

Automatic feeding is fine, if it works! Particularly if the print is not bigger than one full sheet of paper. If the final print consists of more than one (four or more) pages, half of the time something goes wrong and then you will have to do it all over again. So in that case do not use the automatic feeder.

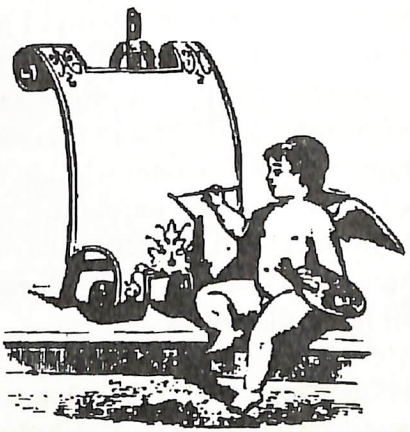
With every machine this particular operation is so different that I leave this to you. However the best system would be roller feed (as I once had on a printer) where the paper is in a roll mounted on the printer!

Before I end this article there is one thing in the process I have not mentioned and that is the Printer Driver. I will leave this out as, although the driver is of primary importance, this is a subject on its own.

Happy printing!

Rudi.
L.R.Florentinus.
Unit 31 Moreton Mews,
98 Bayview Street,
Runaway Bay
Queensland 4216
Phone (07) 55 372475.

●♂☺♀●



Treasurers Report 1994-95

Last financial year continued to be a year of indecision as far as the Amiga is concerned. Members have had to make tough decisions to stay with the Amiga or turn to the IBM clone market. Fortunately the Amiga has a strong and dedicated user base and good dealer support. This is supported by the number of Amiga Magazines still surviving despite no Amiga's being produced for the past year.

We can finally see light at the end of the tunnel, with the sale of Commodore's assets to Escom. With shipments of new machines due around Christmas (that's Christmas '95) we are looking forward to a fresh influx of new members next year.

Even though member numbers and income are down this year, the club remains in a sound financial position. In line with the reduced income, certain cost cutting measures have had to be taken, namely the shift to class rooms for the Tuesday night main meetings. As circumstances change and membership grows, which I am sure it will, this will be re-evaluated.

PD sales have fallen especially at the Sunday workshop meeting. This is due to a number of reasons, CD Rom's, BBS's and the Internet all make PD software more readily available to the masses.

The only unusual financial items in the past year were the sale of the clubs A3000 to K. Antoine. This computer was already being used by Keith for the club's BBS. The other item was the reimbursment to P. Gurney of part repair cost for loan video equipment damaged during last years Computer Exhibition. A summary of this years income and expenditure follows, together with the 1994-1995 Trial Balance.

	92-93	93-94	94-95
Opening Balance	1924.53	5458.18	3906.35
Receipts	20828.00	13161.75	9635.85
Bank Interest	183.85	143.79	87.94
Expenses	17478.20	14857.37	10419.97
Closing Balance	5458.18	3906.35	3210.17

I would like to thank the committee members and past treasurer Ken Clem for all the assistance given to me during the past year.
R. E. Baxter
(Honorary Treasurer)

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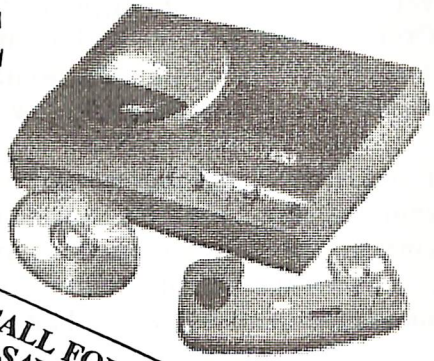

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Dr.	Cr.			Dr.	Cr.	Dr.	Cr.
-	3626.65	1	Stock Sales	-	25.10	-	1813.20
-	5527.90	51	Membership Fees	-	340.00	-	4674.20
-	920.00	55	Library Fees	-	60.00	-	827.85
-	30.00	-	Equipment Hire	-	-	-	70.00
-	2773.00	70	Advertising in Cursor	-	215.00	-	2350.00
-	143.79	75	Interest	-	-	-	87.94
-	-	-	Copying Charge	-	-	-	113.60
-	13021.34	-	TOTAL FOR Sales	-	640.10	-	9936.79
2447.73	-	-	Stock Purchases	-	-	1233.06	-
126.65	-	180	Closing Stock	7.83	-	392.73	-
2574.38	-	-	TOTAL FOR Cost/Sales	7.83	-	1625.79	-
27.52	-	300	Bank Charges	0.95	-	23.30	-
801.19	-	350	BBS Expenses	-	-	614.65	-
5339.71	-	400	Cursor Expenses	390.00	-	4308.22	-
3294.15	-	425	Depreciation	-	-	-	-
132.40	-	450	General Expenses	-	-	329.00	-
353.71	-	500	Insurance	-	-	423.15	-
307.00	-	550	Legal Fees	-	-	328.00	-
157.25	-	570	Postage	-	2.00	146.11	-
70.00	-	580	Post Box Charges	-	-	70.00	-
346.45	-	590	Printing and Stationary	-	-	385.53	-
4.95	-	610	Repairs and Maintenence	-	-	98.80	-
218.91	-	630	Telephone	-	-	68.36	-
1722.20	-	600	Venue Hire	46.00	-	1810.24	-
295.94	-	430	Bad Debts	-	-	-	-
13071.38	-	-	TOTAL FOR Expenses	436.95	2.00	8605.36	-
-	10397.14	1100	Opening Equity	-	-	-	10397.14
-	1056.88	1100	Profit B/Forward	-	-	1567.54	-
-	11454.02	-	TOTAL FOR Equity	-	-	1567.54	10397.14
3906.35	-	-	ANZ Bank	230.15	-	3210.17	-
664.00	-	1250	Trade Debtors	45.00	-	1439.00	-
1820.24	-	1260	Stock on Hand	-	7.83	1427.51	-
10.00	-	1225	Petty Cash President	-	-	10.00	-
40.00	-	1235	Petty Cash Secretary	-	-	-	-
50.00	-	1240	Petty Cash Treasurer	-	-	-	-
10.00	-	-	Change Float Amiga Sales	-	-	10.00	-
6500.59	-	-	TOTAL FOR Curr.Asset	275.15	7.83	6096.68	-
19.00	-	1500	Book Library	-	-	19.00	-
-	-	1505	Magazine Library	60.00	-	130.00	-
366.00	-	1510	Software Library	20.00	-	915.55	-
851.00	-	1520	Equipment	-	150.00	401.00	-
1093.00	-	1530	BBS Equipment	-	-	973.00	-
2329.00	-	-	TOTAL FOR Fixed Ass.	80.00	150.00	2438.55	-
24475.36	24475.36	-	REPORT TOTALS	799.93	799.93	20333.93	20333.93

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Review of the SQUIRREL SCSI INTERFACE

Product Name
Squirrel SCSI Interface, software version 1.06

Brief Description
The Squirrel is a SCSI host adapter for the Amiga 600 and Amiga 1200 that uses the PCMCIA (credit card) slot.

Author/Company Information
Name:Sigmacom
Address:Suite 17, 20-24 Gibbs St., Miranda NSW
Telephone:(02) 524 9846
Fax: (02) 540 4554

List Price
A$169.00

Special Hardware Requirements
Hardware: An A600 or A1200.
Software: None listed.

Machine Used For Testing
A1200 with MTEC 68030/28 MHz board with 4 MB Fast RAM, Internal 545 MB Seagate 3.5" hard drive, Goliath power supply.
SCSI devices tested with the Squirrel:
Quantum LPS 52 and Quantum Lightning 540 hard disks, Archive DAT tape streamer, NEC CDR-25 CD-ROM reader.

Installation
The Squirrel needs to be inserted in the PCMCIA slot on the right of the computer. This should be easy, but it wasn't on the one I tried, because part of the glued-on lid stuck out just a little bit, preventing it from sliding in properly. When I pressed the lid while inserting the device, the Squirrel could be inserted quite easily. The manual warns about not using too much force because of the delicate pins on the PCMCIA port.

The Squirrel may be inserted and removed from the computer even when it is switched on: PCMCIA was designed for this, and it can be very handy if you need to use other PCMCIA peripherals, such as a modem, without having to switch the computer off. The "squirrelscsi.device" is automatically dismounted when the Squirrel is removed.

Next, the software has to be installed. This is done using the standard Commodore Installer and is very easy. The squirrelscsi.device is installed and the User-Startup file is modified to include a SCSIMounter command for each SCSI address, since the Squirrel is not automounting. The user can also install the CD32 emulator or make a boot disk for the Squirrel or for the CD32 emulator.

Review
When Commodore (RIP) first introduced the PCMCIA port on the A600, they told us that this industry standard interface would mean the possibility to add all kinds of devices from memory expansion to modems and network adapters. These have been slow to arrive, but

now more and more peripherals for the Amiga use the credit card slot. At first, only memory cards could be used, but now there is an external IDE controller (Overdrive), CD-ROM adapters (Overdrive and Tandem) and modems can now also be used (using Erik Quackenbush's pcmcom.device).

The Squirrel is the first PCMCIA SCSI adapter designed specifically for the Amiga. It can't be used on a notebook PC because of physical limitations (it's thicker than PCMCIA 2.0 specifications allow), and also there is currently no software driver available for PCs.

The Squirrel is a small, black, plastic box about the size of a credit card but much thicker (about one centimetre). It has an (ugly) yellow sticker on top. The cable is fixed to the casing and has a standard 50 pin Centronics-style connector on the end. It's about 40 cm long, which is quite short.

The Squirrel device driver is fully compatible with Commodore's standards for SCSI host adapters. It uses RDB (Ridged Disk Block), and you can use HDToolBox to partition hard disks.

The Squirrel comes with three disks of software. The first one contains the software needed to operate the interface (the device driver, HDToolBox, SCSIMounter, Installer and the CD32 emulator). The other two disks contain useful stuff from the Aminet ftp sites in LhA archived form. The software version included was 1.06.

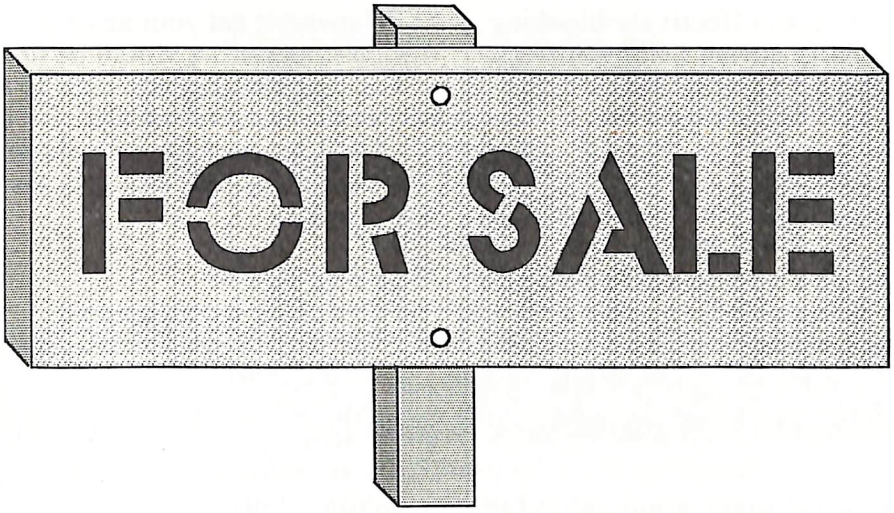
All SCSI devices that I had available (Quantum LPS 52 and Quantum Lightning 540 hard disks, Archive DAT tape streamer, NEC CDR-25 CD-ROM reader) worked fine with the Squirrel. The hard disks obtained the same speed as on an A3000. The DAT tape streamer was tested with AmiBack and the TapeWorm filesystem. The CD-ROM reader was tested with Commodore's CDFileSystem that is part of Workbench 3.1.

I also tried to format a hard disk partition with Professional Filing System by Michiel Pelt, but SCSIMounter doesn't seem to work with PFS partitions. I didn't succeed in making a mount file for it, but it should be possible. I wasn't able to test the CD32 emulator software that is part of the Squirrel package because of the lack of CD32 titles on my part.

Performance

I've tested the Squirrel using DiskSpeed 4.1 with a Quantum Lightning 540S that is normally used in my A3000. The results are roughly the same as on my A3000, and in some cases even slightly faster. As you can see, the Squirrel achieved about 1.2 MB/sec when reading from a file. According to HiSoft, the Squirrel can theoretically obtain 3 MB/sec data transfers on an accelerated A1200.

The big difference on the A1200 compared to the A3000 is that the Squirrel leaves 0% CPU available



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on the A1200, effectively blocking multitasking during SCSI transfers, while the A3000 leaves 46% free on average (77% during reads).

Documentation
The documentation is very good. It looks very professional and explains all the technical details you might want to know. I do miss a troubleshooting chapter with simple 'What To Do If...' questions and answers.

Likes
The Squirrel gives good value for money. It works as expected and has good performance, nice documentation and good support.

Dislikes And Suggestions
The casing could be better, especially the lid that stuck out, preventing the Squirrel from being inserted. The cable is a little bit on the short side. The Squirrel doesn't have automounting or autobooting capabilities, so you must have an internal hard disk or use a boot disk. The driver leaves 0% CPU available during SCSI transfers, which is not a nice thing on a multitasking computer. I hope HiSoft can fix this in a future update of the driver software.

Comparison To Other Similar Products
There are other SCSI host adapters for the PCMCIA port, but they can only be used on PCs since there aren't any Amiga drivers available for them (yet?). The cheapest one I've seen for the PC was almost twice as expensive as the Squirrel, so PC owners: eat your heart out! Another possibility would be to use a SCSI adapter that connects to the trapdoor expansion slot of the A1200. I've personally only seen the GVP in action, and it is also a fine product.

Bugs
None that I have encountered.

Vendor Support
The Squirrel SCSI Interface comes with 30 days of free technical support, which is available by telephone, letter or fax. I've also seen employees of HiSoft present on the Internet, and the update to version 1.05 of the software (1.06 is the current version) was placed on Aminet.

At extra cost, it's also possible to get extended support called Silver and Gold Support which gives you lifetime support and access to a conference on CIX and to their own BBS and free software updates. These extended support schemes seem a bit expensive to me.

Conclusions
I can recommend the Squirrel to anyone who wants to add a CD-ROM or other SCSI devices to his/her A1200. If only HiSoft could manage to change the driver so that it doesn't totally block multitasking during SCSI transfers, then things would be even better.

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